



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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PRESIDENT SIGNS TOUGH NEW WILDLIFE PROTECTION LAW

President Reagan has signed into law legislation that doubles fines and increases other penalties for violating the Lacey Act, the Nation's oldest and most basic wildlife protection law. The Lacey Act makes it illegal to transport in interstate or foreign commerce any wildlife that is taken, possessed, bought, or sold in violation of the laws of States or other countries.

The Lacey Act originally was passed in 1900 to curb market hunting and to help States protect their wildlife against interstate and foreign trade in wildlife and wildlife products. Although the Act has been amended several times, the penalty provisions have been inadequate to discourage escalating illegal trade in increasingly high-profit wildlife products.

"The Lacey Act Amendments give us the tough tools we need to combat the illegal trade that is making damaging inroads on the world's diminishing fish, wildlife, and plants," Interior Secretary James Watt said.

He pointed to the enormous profits being made, with aphrodisiac powders made from rhino horn selling for \$600 an ounce in the Far East; handbags made from crocodile selling for \$400 to \$1,200 in Europe; and the hyacinth macaw, a beautiful purple parrot, selling for \$8,000 in the United States.

"Now that the penalties more closely match the profits," Watt said, "I fully expect violations to decrease as prosecutions become more vigorous and sentences more severe."

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Under the new amendments, violators charged with serious offenses now face possible felony charges with maximum fines of \$20,000 and jail sentences of up to five years. Conviction on misdemeanor charges now can bring a \$10,000 fine and a one-year jail term. Civil penalties include fines of \$10,000 or less.

The extent of illegal traffic in wildlife is unknown but is estimated to run as high as 10 to 25 percent of the legal trade. More than a quarter-million wildlife items with a declared value of over a half-billion dollars were legally imported and exported from the United States in fiscal year 1980. This included over 31 million individual raw wildlife parts (feathers, fur, teeth, etc.), 13 million birds, 5 million reptiles, 45 million mollusks, and 46 million individual products manufactured from wildlife. In addition, another 945 tons of raw and manufactured goods such as sea shells, scrap fur, and scrap leather were imported.

"These figures are particularly staggering when you realize that they include only declared shipments that are legally documented," Watt said.

The new legislation also combined a similar measure protecting fish, the Black Bass Act of 1926, with the Lacey Act and extended coverage for the first time to certain plants and to additional items such as fish roe and coral.

Secretary Watt had warm praise for conservation groups, State wildlife agencies, and other organizations "who have worked tirelessly to help us put teeth in the Lacey Act, as these amendments do."

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